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'Notoriously Religious' or Secularising? Revival and Secularisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

In scholarly literature there is an ongoing debate about the definition and scope of secularisation. This article discusses the question of secularisation in Africa as a post-Christian phenomenon. Particularly, the role of recent Pentecostal revivalism in Sub-Saharan Africa is examined. After some clarification of terms and concepts, the historical relationship between (evangelical) revivalism and secularisation is presented. This template is then used to discuss recent potentially secularising trends in Sub-Saharan Africa. The article concludes with some comparisons and suggestions for further research.

Keywords

secularization – Africa – modernization – revivalism – pentecostalism – evangelicalism – mission

1 Exceptionalism and Africa

In scholarly literature there is an ongoing debate about the definition and scope of secularisation. Part of this discussion is about 'exceptionalisms': is secularisation the rule or rather the exception in modernising countries? And if the classic European secularisation pattern is more or less the standard, why do some modernising nations not seem to secularise? For example, the United States was considered an anomaly for a long time, due to its highly religious

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character. Then the debate turned: it seemed that modernising countries all over the world did not have any problems staying religious or even becoming more religious. Thus, secularising Europe became the exception.[1] Now that the so-called 'nones' are on the rise in America, the tide may turn again. Be that as it may, the question remains: is secularisation a global and somehow inevitable phenomenon, or is it bound up with very specific historical and cultural conditions obtained in (many) Western societies but far less in others?

To some extent the confusion is caused by the character of the term itself: what is called 'secularisation theory' is not a single theory, but rather a hotchpotch of theories held together by the assumption that there is somehow a correlation between modernisation (societal differentiation, urbanisation, individualisation, technology, science, mass media, etc.) on the one hand and the decline of religion on the other.[2] Since both 'modernity' and 'religion' are very heterogeneous terms, the secularisation debate is prone to host diverse and contradictory opinions. However, even when some clarity of definition is achieved the question of secularisation's scope remains. While it is generally accepted that secularisation happens in the West, there is much less agreement with regard to the so-called 'Majority World'.[3] As far as I can see, there are at least three general views.

The first view holds that secularisation is uniquely Western (or even European). Thus, it seems that there is no necessary link between modernisation and secularisation. Secularisation is a cultural contingency, rooted in particular historical experiences that will likely not be repeated elsewhere. Peter Berger, for example, has revoked his general theory of secularisation by pointing out that the world is 'as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever'.[4] In his view, modernity does not necessarily lead to religious

1 Cf. Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

2 For a discussion of secularisation theories, and their relationship to missiological discourse, cf. Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences", *Mission Studies* 28/1 (2011), 3-25. For a helpful historical approach, presenting different 'schools' in the secularisation debate, cf. Philip S. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700", *American Sociological Review* 65/1 (2000), 138-167.

3 The term 'Majority World' is sometimes used in preference to other terms such as 'developing countries', 'third world' or 'the South'. It is considered as more neutral and accurate, as these countries do indeed contain the majority of humanity.

4 Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview", in *Desecularization*, ed. Berger, 2.

decline; the West is and will likely remain an exception to the general rule. This view sits well with assertions such as that 'Africans are notoriously religious' (John Mbiti).[5] Thus, recently it has been argued that 'Africans have embraced a scientific worldview in some ways, but that has not diminished their religious explanations about the social world. (…) Unlike in other parts of the world, Africans remain overwhelmingly religious without signs of waning'.[6]

The second view asserts that secularisation is a universal phenomenon, or, in other words, that the conditions which gave rise to secularisation in the West will probably occur in other parts of the world as well, and with the same consequences. Steve Bruce, for example, believes that secularisation will and does happen in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, now that these societies become influenced by industrialisation, urbanisation, technology, consumerism and individualisation. There is an unmistakeable link between (certain aspects of) modernity and secularity and temporary religious upsurges are no evidence against it. On the contrary, religious revivals, far from being its refutation, in fact confirm the secularisation thesis. According to Bruce, revivals make modernity more palatable for believers by 'disguising the extent of change with some old language', and thus 'providing easy steps away from the old orthodoxies'.[7] From this perspective, it is no surprise to see one observer claim that 'secularism is rapidly becoming a more generalised phenomenon in the African continent, spreading from a small circle of privileged individuals to a whole society undergoing a spectacular evolution'.[8]

The third view agrees with the second view that there is indeed a link between modernisation and secularisation, but as modernisation is a complex phenomenon secularisation will assume different characteristics in different

5 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1. Recently, Mbiti repeated his statement in a somewhat different version: 'Almost by nature Africans are deeply religious' ("Main Features of Twenty-First Century Christianity in Africa", *Missio Africanus* 1/2 (2016), 79). This sentiment is expressed even stronger by Amuluche-Greg Nnamani, "The Flow of African Spirituality into World Christianity: A Case for Pneumatology and Migration", *Mission Studies* 32 (2015), 332. For a critical perspective, cf. Jan Platvoet, Henk J. van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious? Confessing and Contesting an Invention", *Exchange* 32/2 (2003), 123-153. More discussion in Frans Wijsen, "Are Africans Incurably Religious? Discourse Analysis of a Debate, Direction of a Discipline", *Exchange* 46 (2017), 370-397.

6 Baffour K. Takyi, "Secular Government in Sub-Saharan Africa", in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, eds. Phil Zuckerman and John R. Shook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 210.

7 Steve Bruce, *Secularisation: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14. On secularisation in the non-Western world, cf. ibid., chapter 9.

8 Aylward Shorter, "Secularism in Africa: Introducing the Problem", *African Christian Studies* 13/1 (1997), 1. Cf. also his *Secularism in Africa — A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997).

contexts. David Martin, for example, has defended that secularisation — even within Europe — follows different historical pathways. Church-state relationships (France, Russia), the distance between centre and periphery (American Mid-West, Bible-belts), and the degree to which religion became an expression of cultural identity (Northern Ireland, Poland) have influenced the nature and measure of secularisation throughout the West.[9] More or less in line with Eisenstadt's idea of 'multiple modernities',[10] several authors reject a universalizing concept of modernity based on Western (particularly European) experiences. Thus, in a recent issue of the *Cairo Journal of Theology* Herman Paul writes that secularisation in Africa must be liberated from Western connotations. Moreover, he claims that the small body of existing scholarship on secularisation in Africa 'has a lot to offer to Western Christians pondering the pros and cons of their inherited secularisation paradigm'.[11]

In this article I want to explore the shape of secularisation in the Majority World, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, I accept that something like secularisation can and does happen outside the West (contrary to the first view), but that it will play out differently (contrary to the second view). Regardless of the variety in theories of secularisation, what they have in common is the acceptance of societal differentiation as their theoretical core.[12] Societies become more differentiated when ancient agricultural lifestyles based on village life, the extended family and the cycle of seasons are increasingly replaced by lifestyles in which individuals respond to different institutions, each with their own systems and laws based on functional reason and science. There is no use in denying that these developments towards a new social order are happening all over the planet, that is, that the spheres of politics, economics, education, *et cetera* are becoming more autonomous and rationalised — also in Africa. So, while it is important to employ sufficient theoretical flexibility so as to account for the profound differences between the West and the South, there is no reason why we should reject out of hand the possibility of finding similar

9 David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Idem, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

10 Shmuel Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002). Cf. Benno van den Toren and Willem J. de Wit, "Secularisation and Discipleship in Africa: Conclusions and Recommendations", *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015), 153.

11 Herman Paul, "Secularisation in Africa: A Research Desideratum", *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015), 75. The examples that he gives are mostly instances of the so-called 'internal secularisation' of religions, a phenomenon which is amply described by standard secularisation theories. Unfortunately, this special issue of *CJT*, while dedicated to the study of secularisation in Africa, does not pay attention to the current state of affairs in the social sciences with regard to secularisation theory.

12 Paas, "Post-Christian". Cf. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate", 142-143.

correlations between industrialisation, urbanisation, and technology on the one hand and religious change on the other in the South — even though these correlations have been first observed in the West.[13] After all, what cannot be compared cannot be understood.

In studying non-Western secularisation, I take a cue from the classic idea of Max Weber, recently updated by a number of scholars, that secularisation in many respects is a post-*Christian* phenomenon.[14] In other words, Christianity — especially in its capacity to reform minds and manners — has unintendedly contributed to its own demise. If that is the case, the success of Christian evangelism all over the world is likely to have long-term consequences for the emergence of secularisation outside the West.[15] Here I will concentrate on religious revivals, as they are well-attested in history as well as cross-culturally. My hypothesis is that the deeply individualistic concept of evangelism employed in revivals contributes to the development of what Charles Taylor has aptly termed 'the buffered self'. With this concept he points to the emergence of the modern individual who increasingly feels existentially secure, through disenchantment on the one hand and confidence in his or her powers of moral ordering on the other.[16] This buffered self is opposed to the 'porous self', identified by the lack of a clear boundary between mind and world, thus opening the mind to all sorts of visible and invisible influences from the outside world.[17]

So, there are two elements that contribute to this impregnable or 'buffered' self, and they will be the focus of this article: (a) the development of new ways of thinking (reformation of mind), more or less comparable to Weber's ideas of rationalisation and disenchantment, and (b) the 'reformation of manners' (self-discipline and activism) that creates a disciplined lifestyle and (often) wealth. Both disciplined thinking and a disciplined life lead to an increased sense of existential security. Recent cross-cultural research shows that the level of existential security predicts rather well how important religion is for individuals and societies (see below, section 3). This alone suggests that there actually is something universal in the secularisation experience. Moreover,

13 As for Africa, cf. Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), esp. 157-160.

14 Cf. for example, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007); Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Penguin, 2014).

15 Cf. already William J. Samarin, "Religion and Modernization in Africa", *Anthropological Quarterly* 39 (1966), 288-297, esp. 295, footnote 8: 'One should have to rank Christian missions as the greatest secularising forces in Africa'.

16 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 27, cf. 37-42.

17 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 27, 35-43.

existential security contributes to the emergence of a post-materialist worldview with highly subjectivist values and life-projects that do not sit well with traditional religion.

In what follows I will first discuss some conceptual issues regarding secularisation. Then I will flesh out the revivalist experience and its attendant concept of evangelism, based on the historical template of the eighteenth century revivals in Europe. I will focus on the modernising and secularising elements of these revivals, that is their disciplines of thought and conduct that contribute to 'buffered' selves or a sense of existential security. Third, I will turn to the Pentecostal revivals of Sub-Saharan Africa, and I will ask whether we see similar trends towards secularisation there. I will conclude this article with some suggestions for further research.

2 The Concept of Secularisation

The term 'secularisation' denotes a process by which (gradually or rapidly, unintendedly or intentionally) the 'religious' gives way to the 'secular'. Clearly, the term predicates on the possibility to define both the 'secular' and the 'religious', and subsequently to distinguish them from each other. Several scholars have pointed out that this distinction 'emerged as a theological category of Western Christendom that has no equivalent in other religious traditions or even in Eastern Christianity'.[18] According to José Casanova the recognition of this historical fact means that processes of secularisation due to the 'world-historical process of globalization initiated by the European colonial expansion' are 'dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted'.[19] The same goes, by contrast, for the category (not the term as such) of the 'religious' that was a product of Western modernity. In other words, to raise the question whether 'secularisation' happens in Africa, or in other parts of the Majority World, is to project a historically Western and Christian dichotomy between 'religion' and 'secularity' on societies where this dichotomy may not be as relevant, or even understood at all. Also, by its naïve use of words like 'civilisation' and 'modernity', it tends to construct a universal global-historical reality where different nations and people groups are classified based on the 'level' of civilisation they

18 José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms", in *Rethinking Secularism.* eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan van Antwerpen (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56. Cf. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

19 Casanova, "The Secular", 61.

have achieved, whereby European secularity is usually the tacit norm against which progress is measured.[20] On the other hand, if Western secularity is indeed 'fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian' (Casanova) we may ask whether secularisation of a more Western type — societal differentiation and religious decline — may happen in other parts of the world as well, as a long-term consequence of successful Christian mission. That is, at least, the question that will be discussed below.

As for the distinction itself, attempts to define and distinguish 'religious' from 'secular' beliefs, routines or attitudes, are always somewhat arbitrary.[21] For example, is giving gifts to ancestors in African traditions 'religious'? In 1936 J.H. Driberg argued that it is 'in fact a purely secular attitude', as ancestors are not worshipped but simply recognized as somehow still one with the society of the living.[22] Similarly, John Peel, in his fascinating study of the appropriation of Christianity by the Yoruba in Nigeria, notes the reluctance of especially African Christians in the 19th century to designate Yoruba religion as a 'religion' at all. They preferred to call the daily practices of incantations, sacrifices, rituals, healings and so forth as 'making country fashion'.[23] To frame the practice of ancestor veneration as 'religious' (or 'purely secular', for that matter) may have more to do with the lenses of Western missionaries than with African self-understanding. Similar claims are made about other aspects of African religion, as we shall see below. This shows how the use of terms like 'cult', 'worship' or 'religion' for certain features of African cultures are already burdened with meaning, and may hold the risk of reconstructing such features in terms of the classic Western dichotomy between 'religion' and the 'secular'. On the other hand, the same problem goes with other concepts such as 'nation', 'state', 'politics', 'art', 'private/public', 'people' or 'economy'. If a word or a distinction has not been explicitly minted by a certain culture, or is not even recognized by it, this does not mean that it cannot be used to analyse some of its expressions. Peel, for example, makes abundant and convincing use of the concept 'religion' to describe 19th-century Yoruba customs.[24]

Another important point to make is that the 'secular' and the 'religious' are not mutually exclusive categories or essences. Practices and discourses can be

20 Casanova, "The Secular", 63.

21 Cf. Asad, *Formations*, 25.

22 J.H. Driberg, "The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa", *Journal of the Royal African Society* 35 (1936), 1-21. I derive this quotation from Jack David Eller, "Varieties of Secular Experience" in *Handbook.* Zuckerman, Shook, 499.

23 John D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 90.

24 Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 88-90.

'secular' or 'religious' depending on who is looking or how they are explained.[25] Take, for example, a cross on a church building. Is this a 'religious' symbol, reflecting the memory of Christ's death for our sins, or is it rather a 'secular' symbol representing the public presence of the church as a factor in society? When the Pope speaks, does this qualify as religious discourse or is it rather political speech? When a politician says that human rights are 'sacred', is that a secular or a religious claim? One could argue that, in order to have an impact in this world, religions must engage with the secular and mundane in all sorts of ways. Or, in Jack Eller's nice phrase: '[R]eligion slips into the world as the world slips into religion'.[26] Again, this shows that it will not do to assume that terms like 'religion' and the 'secular' can be universalized, or that they represent certain essences that can be found everywhere. Recognizing this may in the end mean that the whole distinction becomes obsolete, or dies the death of a thousand definitions. However, it may retain something of its meaning within delimited discourses such as secularisation as a post-Christian phenomenon. And this points, again, towards constructing the question about secularisation in Africa as a question about the consequences of some types of Christian evangelism in this continent.

3 An 'Enlightenment of the Common Man'

As John and Jean Comaroff have pointed out in their study of British nonconformist missionaries to the South-African Tswana in the early 19th century, their mission was to a large extent a 'civilizing' mission. Intellectuals, missionaries and politicians were in agreement about Christianity as more or less the soul of Western civilisation. Committed to self-improvement and always aware of the fragile nature of their achievements, the missionaries used their own (idealised) biographies as the template to lead the heathen to salvation.

> And what they wished to see was a neat fusion of three idealized worlds: the scientific, capitalist age in its most ideologically roseate form, wherein individuals were free to better themselves and to aspire to every greater heights; an idyllic countryside in which, alongside agrarian estates, hard-working peasants, equipped with suitable tools, might produce gainfully for the market; and a sovereign Empire of God, whose temporal affairs

25 Eller, "Varieties", 502.
26 Eller, "Varieties", 512.

> would remain securely under the eye, if not the daily management, of divine authority.[27]

Elsewhere I have described in more detail how this enterprise implied the restructuring of mind and manners.[28] In her *Roads to Modernity*, Gertrude Himmelfarb emphasises the extent to which Wesley's Methodism popularised Enlightenment thinking among its constituency. She goes so far as to call evangelicalism 'something like an Enlightenment of the common man'.[29] Similarly, other authors such as David Bebbington and Jeremy Gregory have emphasised the merger of Enlightenment rationalism and biblical piety that was characteristic of the evangelical movement.[30] David Bosch writes about the mission movement that emerged from the evangelical revivals as 'mission in the wake of the Enlightenment'. He describes this mission movement as democratic, activist, individualised, and with great confidence in human powers of reason and organization.[31]

Early evangelicalism's emphasis on disciplined thinking and a reasonable faith had to do with its conversionism. For sincere believers there was the possibility of absolute assurance of salvation. David Bebbington considers this doctrine the 'underlying factor' of the discontinuities between earlier Anglo-Saxon conservative Protestantism and evangelicalism. According to him, the dynamism of the evangelical movement 'was possible only because its adherents were assured in their faith'.[32] He traces this back to the far greater confidence of the evangelical preachers in the powers of human knowledge. Assured knowledge of God was possible, and this meant a great deal for the confidence individual Christians could have in seeing what was right for society, and for fighting its evils.[33]

In the background of all this lie some problems emerging from the success of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and 17th century. Although many scholars have emphasised the Reformation's rationalising character, taking its

27 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 59.

28 Stefan Paas, "Revival, Reason and Riches: Evangelism and Secularization". Some paragraphs in this section have been derived from this article.

29 Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 126.

30 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 50-55; Jeremy Gregory, "Introduction: Transforming the 'Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32/3 (2009), 287-305.

31 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008 (24th ed.)), 262-345.

32 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 42.

33 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 47-48.

anti-sacramental and individualistic tendency as examples,[34] one could also defend the claim that exactly these features increased anxiety among those it affected. While it could not and would not abolish the idea of a cosmos in which supernatural forces were active, Protestantism was deprived of the protective means provided by the Catholic sacramental system. To depict the Protestant tradition as a straightforward process of 'disenchantment' would, therefore, be a mistake. On the contrary, Robert Scribner mentions a host of examples from 16th and 17th century Protestant Europe which demonstrate how these early Protestants lived in a porous universe, taking their recourse to all sorts of (word) magic in order to still their fears.[35] For a long time, and in some respects more than ever before, demons, devils, witches and curses were an ingredient of serious theological and philosophical discourse.[36] In this sense there are interesting parallels with today's Pentecostalism in large parts of the world.[37] It may be the case that a transition from traditional, collective forms of folk religion towards individualised, modern religious beliefs often goes through an intermediate stage of existential angst in which all sorts of previously 'domesticated' spiritual forces break loose and must be 'tamed' again. Meanwhile, the emergence of new individualised religious practices finds much of its motivation in the urge to control this unruly spiritual realm by reinforcing the individual's defences up to the point where the existence of the supernatural becomes implausible.

Evangelicalism, then, brought assuredness, both on the spiritual and the societal level. As a disciplining force, it was 'an avenue of upward social mobility', and thus there was 'a natural tendency for converted characters to gain skills, find regular employment and so rise out of the lowest ranks of society'.[38] In the modern missionary movement that arose from these experiences the evangelical ethos was considered as the soul of a transformed society, which resulted in promoting the revivalist experience as a key to changing societies haunted by

34 Cf. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularisation Debate", 148-150. For an example, cf. Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

35 Cf. Robert W. Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World'", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23/3 (1992), 475-494.

36 Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-3.

37 See, for example, a similar explanation for the success of Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Ghana, by Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), xviii. On 'word magic' in neo-Pentecostalism, cf. my "Mission from Anywhere to Europe: Americans, Africans, and Australians Coming to Amsterdam", *Mission Studies*, 32/1 (2015), 4-31.

38 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 25-27, 111, 126-127.

paganism and superstition for the good.[39] Already in 1811 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions declared: 'Now is the time for the followers of Christ to come forward boldly and engage earnestly in the great work of enlightening and reforming mankind'.[40] In her analysis of American Protestant mission activity in 19th century Syria and Lebanon Marwa Elshakry shows how 'enlightenment' was seen as a precondition for 'reformation'. Thus, a 'conversion to modernities' (Peter van der Veer) was a crucial step in the process of preparing 'backward' societies for Christianity. Evangelistic mission usually went together with the promotion of Western medicine and science education, with the explicit purpose of demonstrating the futility of traditional ways of thinking and to replace them by a Christian mind-set. In the end, this could mean that 'an exclusively religious concern with conversion was complicated by a growing commitment to secular and civilizing ventures'.[41]

Assuredness also expressed itself in the material realm. A 'reformation of manners' (William Wilberforce) would usually lead to an improvement in terms of education, employment and income. And as increasing wealth often tempers religious zeal, this could easily become another driver of secularisation. John Wesley himself already noticed how conversion could lead to religious indifference. In 1786, at the age of 83, Wesley wrote a letter, titled 'Thoughts on Methodism', in which he postulated a causal relationship between the personal discipline gained by conversion to Christianity and the erosion of faith.[42] Wesley's observations are in line with the virtually universal claim by religious leaders throughout history that wealth is an enemy of a serious faith and religious practice. Their more or less intuitive belief that it is more difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, has been confirmed by modern social scientists. There is a strong inverse correlation between wealth and religiosity, both on the individual level and on the level of nations.[43] With regard to the

39 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 46-84.

40 Quoted in Marwa Elshakry, "The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut", *Past and Present* 196 (2007), 173-214, 174.

41 Elshakry, "Gospel", 174.

42 Thomas Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley* (The University of California: Zondervan Publishers, 1872), Vol. 13, 258, 260-261, sections 1, 10-12, 'Thoughts upon Methodism' (supplementary letters, 4 August 1786).

43 Gregory Paul, "The Chronic Dependence of Popular Religiosity upon Dysfunctional Psychosociological Conditions", *Evolutionary Psychology* 7/3 (2009). Cf. Katie Simmons et al., "Worldwide, Many See Belief in God as Essential to Morality: Richer Nations Are Exception", *Pew Research Center* (updated May 27, 2014; available online). For an elaborate discussion, cf. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Cf. further Tom Rees,

latter, it must be added that this correlation can be observed predominantly in nations where wealth is spread relatively equally among the population. In countries where there are huge differences between the rich and the poor (such as the United States), religiosity seems less affected by an increase of the total national wealth. Probably the personal insecurity that is the result of a very unequal distribution of wealth, stimulates people to take refuge in religion, whereas in countries with a good social security system the need for religion diminishes.

Of course, evangelical missions were not out to secularise the Majority World.[44] But there is reason to assume that they contributed, both within and outside the West, to the emergence of a 'buffered self'. By its promotion of rational thinking in religion and its emphasis on disciplined bodies, it had the potential to secularise those among whom it had success. While there is no necessary connection between assured selves and secularisation (as evangelicalism amply testifies), one can lead to another. This may especially be the case where revivals are part of wider changes in lifestyles and socio-economic conditions in societies — such as the shift from a traditional agricultural society to a more urban and individualised society. The Anglo-Saxon revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries belonged to such a context. The same phenomenon may be observed today in countries where similar conditions of industrialisation and urbanisation play out against a background of traditional religiosity. The next section explores several possible examples.

4 Secularisation in Africa

According to Jonathan R. Beloff '[a]gnosticism and atheism have (…) increased sharply' in Rwanda among the community of those who survived the genocide of 1994. The killings have also triggered a response on the part of government parties to work towards a separation of church and state, thus initiating a differentiation of religion and politics in a very religious country.[45] In a

"Is Personal Insecurity a Cause of Cross-National Differences in the Intensity of Religious Belief?", *Journal of Religion and Society* 11 (2009), 1-24; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, "Are High Levels of Existential Security Conducive to Secularisation? A Response to Our Critics", in *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*, ed Stanley D. Brunn (Dordrecht: Springer Science, 2015), 3389-3408.

44 For a useful critique, cf. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 5.

45 Jonathan R. Beloff, "The Historical Relationship between Religion and Government in Rwanda", in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age.* eds. Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, George Levine (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 205-221.

different way, but based on a similar critique of the problematic relationship of a dominant Christianity with the ruling powers, South-Africa's 1996 Constitution 'requires the state to be neutral in religious matters and to follow non-discriminatory policies towards the followers of all religions'.[46] Moreover, Nico Vorster presents some census data indicating that between 1996 and 2001 the percentage of those who claimed to have no religion grew from 11.7 to 15.1 percent. He also notes a 'rapid de-churchification' within the white Afrikaner community and traditional English-speaking churches, but nothing similar within black communities.[47] This difference is explained partly by the high levels of 'education, material welfare and connectedness' to the global world of the white community, and partly by the different roles Christianity has played for blacks and whites in the struggle around apartheid.[48] And to add yet another structural feature of possible secularisation: several authors mention the changing patterns of family life in Africa, due to urbanisation and education, which may affect religious socialisation as well.[49] Studies in the West have shown how even overwhelmingly religious societies can secularise in the course of a few generations when religious socialisation begins to falter.

This mixed picture shows that the link between modernisation (in itself a very heterogeneous concept) and secularisation should not be essentialised. We may very well see different and opposing trends at the same time in modernising countries. On the other hand, these examples suggest that some forms of secularisation may and do happen in Sub-Saharan Africa. This invites us to take a closer look at the supposed link between Protestant revivalism and (long-term) secularisation. Does this pattern repeat itself in Africa?

4.1 *Christianity and Secularisation in Africa*

As Africa has experienced an explosion of revivalist Christianity,[50] it should be a fertile ground to investigate correlations between the development of a

46 Nico Vorster, "Christianity and Secularisation in South Africa: Probing the Possible Link between Modernisation and Secularisation", *Studies in World Christianity* 19/2 (2013), 147.

47 Vorster, "Christianity and Secularisation", 150.

48 Vorster, "Christianity and Secularisation", 155-156.

49 On changes in African family life in general, cf. Gerald K. Tanye, *The Church-As-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2010). On changing family patterns and secularisation, cf. Kang'entu Geoffrey Kimathi, "The Rise of Secularisation in Kenya and Its Impact to the Church", (MA Thesis Norwegian School of Theology , 2017), 97-99.

50 Examples in J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pulling down Strongholds: Evangelism, Principalities and Powers and the African Pentecostal Imagination", *International Review of Mission* 382/383 (2007), 306-317.

'buffered self' as a consequence of conversion on the one hand and deterioration of religious enthusiasm on the other. However, there is very little research into secularisation in Africa.[51] This may partly be due to the aforementioned ethnicist view that Africans are 'notoriously religious' (John Mbiti). As such, secularisation may be seen as a purely Western import product, imposed on Africans by development agencies[52] or Western academic education. As for the latter influence, this was already noticed by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers in its 1972 colloquium on secularism in Kampala, Uganda. The report that was issued defined secularisation as an increase of indifferentism and unbelief among the educated minorities as a result of Western-style higher education.[53] Benno van den Toren suggests that in French-speaking Africa the influence of the Western idea that to be 'educated' means to be 'secular' may be stronger than in other parts of Africa.[54] He also notes that in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, especially the rich 'tend to push their faith to the margins of their lives'. He writes: '[I]t seems that many go to church when they are in need, but when they enter into the more affluent constituencies of society they no longer feel the need for church attendance'.[55] It is unclear to what extent this relates to a revivalist prehistory, but is an indication that the same inverse correlation between wealth and religious fervour that has been noticed elsewhere is also a feature in African milieus.

Interestingly, Van den Toren suggests that there is a form of secularisation that is 'more specific for Africa: the secularisation of religion by making religious practices (…) serve secular goals'.[56] He quotes John V. Taylor, who said that Africa's 'this-worldliness' might easily turn to 'materialism'. Van den Toren

51 Cf. Paul, "Secularisation in Africa".

52 Cf. Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, "Secularisation and Development in Africa: A Terrific Façade", *Global Journal of Human Social Science* 13/6 (2013), 15-19.

53 *Sécularisation en Afrique? Secularisation in Africa?*, Rome: Secretariat for non-believers 1973. For discussion, cf. Shorter, 'Secularism in Africa'; Paul, "Secularisation in Africa", 69-70.

54 Benno van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches", *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22/1 (2003), 8.

55 Ibid., 4, 7-8. For a similar perspective, cf. Elio Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris: Presses de l'UCAC, 1997), 79.

56 Ibid., 11-12; Van den Toren and De Wit, "Secularisation and Discipleship", 156-157. Cf. also Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 215-247, shows how for the nineteenth-century Yoruba Christianity was interesting to the extent that it was associated with 'power'. Such power was needed to achieve children, money and a long life — the main preoccupations of Yoruba religion. His chapter on conversion contains fascinating parallels to Van den Toren's argument.

adds his concern about the 'charismatic movement' in Africa, which combines 'a health and wealth Gospel with a theology that sees financial and physical prosperity as a direct consequence of a life according to God's will'.[57] He adds that from a Christian perspective 'the God-directed focus should be a central element of true religion in distinction from all sorts of semi- or even pseudo-religious practices'.[58] This 'remarkably qualitative'[59] approach of secularisation might open new perspectives towards research of secularisation in Africa, but I would like to emphasise that a pragmatic use of religion in itself is not what most scholars would see as secularisation. People have always and everywhere prayed to the gods for healing, success, children, or security. 'Secularisation' denotes a *process* in which religion becomes less important for societies and individuals. In other words, if Africans would *stop* praying for health or money, and turn to other means to achieve these goals, this would be a sure sign of secularisation. In short, it would amount to a category mistake to confuse the 'secular' dimension that every religion inevitably has (and which, in fact, points to the *importance* of religion in daily life rather than its opposite) with the process of secularisation by which religion loses its importance and is relegated to abstract, non-consequential spheres.

Nevertheless, this instrumental view of religion, while in itself not secularisation, may lead to secularisation when people feel that religion has served its purpose or fails to deliver. This may well happen through an initial stage of revival. Van den Toren asserts that the rapid urbanisation of Africa offers 'great opportunities for Christian witness', thus referring to the revivalist pattern of early modern Europe and modern Latin America. However, he also notes that his move to the cities 'is a cause for backsliding and secularisation'.[60] Here he seems to think mainly of well-described secularising features like the differentiation and rationalisation of modern city life. Earlier this was noted by Aylward Shorter, and recently this has been reiterated by Kang'entu Geoffrey Kimathi based on his fieldwork in Nairobi. Kimathi finds that decreasing church attendance, the erosion of Christian morality and the increase of 'nominal' religion in Kenya applies more to the young than to the old, more to the educated than to the illiterate and more to the affluent than to the poor.[61] In the same vein Dick Seed mentions 'Africa's rapid transition in the use of technology' as a secularising factor (rationalisation), as well as 'new levels of

57 Van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa", 26.

58 Benno van den Toren, "African Neo-Pentecostalism in the Face of Secularisation: Problems and Possibilities", *Cairo Theological Journal* 2 (2015), 109.

59 Thus, Paul, "Secularisation in Africa", 74.

60 Ibid., 18. Cf. Van den Toren and De Wit, "Secularisation and Discipleship", 160.

61 Shorter, *Secularism in Africa*; Kimathi, "The Rise of Secularisation".

material prosperity' which 'feeds into the sense of well-being and disassociation with spiritual issues that dominated the past'.[62] According to Seed, the church has contributed to this emerging secular outlook through its mission, by its attempt to break the power of the spiritual world with Western medicine, by introducing an education system founded on secularised principles and the adoption of science in agriculture. Thus, it has 'responded to spiritual questions with secular answers and so advanced secularisation'.[63] That Christianity is 'among the ancient causes of secularisation in Africa' is emphasised by a number of African scholars, thus reinforcing the idea that there is a correlation between Christian evangelism and secularisation.[64]

4.2 *Pentecostalism as a Secularising Force in Africa?*

All this raises the question to what extent Pentecostalism, the most popular and fastest growing variety of Christianity in modern Africa,[65] may be a sign of or even a driver towards (more) secularisation in this continent. Pentecostalism is not only the historical successor of 18th and 19th century evangelicalism (Methodism), but it also contains many structural parallels with this older revival-movement, both in terms of its internal dynamics and in terms of the societal conditions in which it thrives.[66] Throughout the world, Pentecostalism appears particularly attractive to the upwardly mobile and it often promotes an entrepreneurial spirit. Moreover, recent versions of Pentecostalism almost universally preach a version of the so-called 'prosperity gospel', encouraging believers to pursue material wealth as a clear sign of God's blessing. Finally, Pentecostalism seems to thrive especially in societies where a transition has started from older, Durkheimian forms of religion (or Christianity) to more modern, individualised patterns. As such, it may also become a driver of (more) secularisation when its reformation of minds and manners is successful.

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62 Dick Seed, "Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church", *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015), 78.

63 Seed, "Western Secularism", 83. For a somewhat different perspective, cf. Retief Müller, "Afrikaner Missionaries and the Slippery Slope of Praying for Rain", *Exchange* 46 (2017), 29-45.

64 E.g., Abiola T. Dopanu, "Secularisation, Christianity and the African Religion in Yoruba-land", *AFER* 48/3 (2006), 146-147; Abel Ngarsouledé, "Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularisation in Africa", *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015), 94.

65 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Evangelism", 310, calls this the 'Pentecostalisation' of African Christianity. Cf. also Damaris Seleina Parsitau, "From the Periphery to the Centre: The Pentecostalisation of Mainline Christianity in Kenya", *Missionalia* 35/3 (2007), 83-111.

66 Cf. David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), esp. chapter 2 ("The Methodist Model: Anglo-American Cultural Production Reproduced in Latin America").

All the same, Pentecostalism with its deeply enchanted worldview seems a very unfit candidate for being associated with secularisation. In fact, some authors have explained the emergence of Pentecostalism in Africa as a reaction against the presumed rationalising approach of Western mission.[67] Thus, in his study of influential Pentecostal preachers from Nigeria, Paul Gifford argues that 'the enchanted imagination is pervasive in African Pentecostalism'.[68] He rejects the view that Africa is just another variety of modernity, given its strong belief in magic, and the thoroughly anti-scientific philosophy of African neo-Pentecostal leaders. Moreover, the deep-rooted fears and suspicions generated by belief in witchcraft are generally a counterforce to the formation of wealth, as economic progress depends on a society where people feel that they can trust each other.[69] As such, secularisation theories based on the decrease of religion in industrialising countries of the West miss the point with regard to Africa: they underestimate that African religion is totally different from religion in other parts of the world.[70]

Somewhat similarly, Linda van de Kamp shows how Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Mozambique make their attendants lose considerable amounts of money through tithing and sacrificing, while making especially urban women more suspicious of their spouses, relatives and friends through their constant hammering on the theme of witchcraft.[71] Surely, she points out how Pentecostal churches help women to 'arm' themselves against the evil influence of the so-called 'spirit spouse', a presumed invisible 'husband' who penetrates the female body and obstructs sexuality, marriage and procreation. However, this 'buffering of the self' is not done through a reformation of the mind, for example by denying that the spirit spouse exists, but through 'magical' means. Women are taught to mistrust their own relatives, as they can very

67 E.g., Asamoah-Gyadu, "Evangelism", 309; Rijk van Dijk, "After Pentecostalism? Exploring Intellectualism, Secularisation and Guiding Sentiments in Africa", in *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age*, ed. Marian Burchardt et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 217-218.

68 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity*, 147.

69 This may not be the case in other African nations. See, e.g., Harri Englund, "Pentecostalism beyond Belief: Trust and Democracy in a Malawian Township", *Africa* 77/4 (2007), 477-499, who claims that Pentecostalism in Malawi furthers civility and mutual trust, and Naomi Haynes, "Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money: Prosperity, Inequality, and Religious Sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* 18 (2012), 134-135, who claims that the material wealth gained by individuals can reinforce a society where social relationships are structured around economic inequality.

70 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity*, 163-164.

71 Linda van de Kamp, *Violent Conversion: Brazilian Pentecostalism and the urban pioneering of women in Mozambique* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011), 47-51, 133-160, 197-219.

well be channels for evil spirits and they are encouraged to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance to expose the spirit spouse. They participate in exorcist rituals offered by the church and they assume techniques of 'spiritual warfare'. Van de Kamp admits that these practices address 'the challenges of contemporary urban life in Maputo and offer women techniques to regain or establish control' in rapidly changing social conditions. But the techniques that are offered are more focused on the body than on the mind, and to some extent they increase the sense of disconnection and vulnerability that is the consequence of individualisation and the loosening of family ties.[72] So, while contributing somehow to the development of a 'buffered self', the 'buffering' is a reformation of 'manners' rather than 'mind'. The enchanted world is left intact, and is even affirmed to the point where it becomes a constant threat for individuals who do no longer have the protection of relatives or traditional magic.

This seems to support the thesis that African Pentecostalism is a 'revenge of the sacred', a typical religious response of the notoriously religious African mind to secularising pressures from the West. However, this is only one part of the story. Many students of Pentecostalism underline its thoroughly this-worldly character. Regardless of how enchanted African Pentecostalism is, eventually God and all spiritual matters are employed in the interest of immanent goals.[73] Pentecostal preachers stimulate people to seize opportunities to overcome poverty, by taking initiative and starting businesses.[74] They offer business courses to converts, thus fostering an entrepreneurial attitude to life. As such, in its emphasis on personal discipline and honesty, Pentecostalism is often considered to be a religion that furthers upward social mobility.[75] Van de Kamp argues that Pentecostalism's criticism of the traditional social order

72 Van de Kamp, *Violent Conversion*, 149-160.

73 Much literature in Paas, "Mission from Anywhere to Europe". Cf. further Van den Toren, "African Neo-Pentecostalism", 103-120.

74 Cf. Joseph Bosco Bangura, *The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980-2010): A Missio-Historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2013), 237-238; André P. Czeglédy, "A New Christianity for a New South Africa: Charismatic Christians and the Post-Apartheid Order", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38 (2008), 287-288; Lovemore Togarasei, "Modern/Charismatic Pentecostalism as a Form of 'Religious' Secularisation in Africa", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 41/1 (2015), 61.

75 Donald E. Miller, Tetsuano Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007). Cf. Peter Berger, "Faith and Development", *Society* 46/1 (2009), 69-75, esp. 71. Sedefka V. Beck and Sara J. Gundersen have found that Pentecostal affiliation correlates with higher earned income in Ghana ("A Gospel of Prosperity? An Analysis of the Relationship between Religion and Earned Income in Ghana, the Most Religious Country in the World", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55/1 [2016], 105-129).

in Africa introduces a new dynamic of individualism which is actually representative of neo-liberal globalisation itself rather than an attempt to accommodate socio-economic change by drawing from religious sources.[76] So, while her assessment of Pentecostalism's influence on economic development in Mozambique is rather negative, she asserts that Pentecostalism is a 'practice of pioneering', connecting well with the pioneer society and mentality that can be found in urban settings in Africa.[77] As such it may not contribute to a more prosperous society throughout, but to a society where there are a few 'winners' and many 'losers'. And these 'winners' might very well become the secularising core of a future (urban) Africa, especially when they join forces with more rationalising approaches within Pentecostalism to reduce its 'devil mania' and 'exaggerated demonology'.[78]

Also, Van de Kamp observes that many members eventually become fed up with the constant pressures by Pentecostal preachers and leave the church or attend another church that is less demanding.[79] In the same vein, Rijk van Dijk describes how 'the emerging middle classes' in Ghana and Botswana are attracted by Pentecostalism's emphasis on 'intellectualism' and a 'critical mentality' against traditional social structures and traditional Christianity. However, this particular pattern of 'religious modernity' eventually creates resistance against the 'noise, shouting and screaming of the Pentecostal leaders, the "too-muchness" of their demands in terms of time, attention, energy and money, and about what was perceived as the uncritical acceptance of the elevated status of Pentecostal leaders, which allowed too little room for discussion or reflection of what they said and did'. Thus, 'the educated classes are turning away from this involvement in Pentecostal faith'.[80] However, these people, while not returning to the traditional churches, 'are not abandoning the notions of the dark forces that may present themselves in life'. Therefore, assuming a (public) position as a non-believer is not a viable option, as this would leave the individual extremely vulnerable to the forces of darkness and render him or her a constant threat to others.[81] So, while Pentecostalism's

76 According to Togarasei, "Modern/Charismatic Pentecostalism", 60, this undermining of 'traditional values in favour of modern, secular values' (consumerism, individualism) is in itself a form of secularisation. Likewise in Effiong Joseph Udo, "Secularism and Pentecostalism", *Missionalia* 40/1 (2012), 132-153.

77 Van de Kamp, *Violent Conversion*, 50-51.

78 Cf. Nnamani, "The Flow of African Spirituality", 343.

79 Cf. Van de Kamp, *Violent Conversion*, 218. Cf. Linda van de Kamp, "South-South Transnational Spaces of Conquest: Afro-Brazilian Pentecostalism, *Feitiçaria* and the Reproductive Domain in Urban Mozambique", *Exchange* 42 (2013), 360.

80 Van Dijk, "After Pentecostalism", 215, 218, 228-229.

81 Van Dijk, "After Pentecostalism", 218.

capacity to liberate traditional people from unchallenged religious authority and collective patterns may eventually lead people to leave the church altogether, there is as yet no indication that this also leads to a disenchanted worldview. The most we can say is that with regard to Africa's secularisation late modern Pentecostalism is an ambiguous force.[82]

4.3 *Comparisons*

At this point we may recall that Taylor's 'buffered self' consists of two elements: (1) a 'reformation of mind', usually taken as the emergence of a disenchanted worldview, and (2) a 'reformation of manners', producing a disciplined lifestyle with wealth-inducing values. As for the first element, there are some indications that this has happened among a small minority of educated and prosperous elites in at least some African countries. However, it is unclear whether this is related in any way to religious revival. As far as we can see, this type of 'buffering' is connected with Western-style education that was established in Africa through the efforts of older missions from Europe and the United States. Pentecostals, on the other hand, seem to have focused on the second element, while leaving an enchanted worldview intact (or even reinforcing it). Thus, it exemplifies what some scholars consider as a very African type of secularisation: instrumentalising religion in order to achieve material success. Above I have explained why I do not find this a very convincing approach of secularisation. Pentecostalism may be an example of the way in which Africans have always connected the religious with the secular, but that is not what *secularisation* (as a social process) is about.

So, what does this mean for the possible secularising potential of Pentecostalism in Africa? Let me first say that the enchanted nature of African Pentecostalism does not necessarily suggest that Africa is taking an entirely different route towards modernity.[83] After all, as I have pointed out above, Europe has more or less experienced the same pattern: in a context of beginning modernisation the spiritual powers that used to be domesticated to some extent in traditional religion, broke loose and had to be tamed again by all sorts of exorcism. Far from becoming more rationalistic, post-Reformation Europe experienced a revival of the enchanted universe. It may be the case that a similar pattern occurs in Africa today, where traditional societies are rapidly disappearing without adequate resources to handle the spiritual chaos that follows from this. This is not to deny the particularity of Africa, but it suggests that a temporary upsurge of the supernatural can very well be part of a process of

82 Van den Toren, "African Neo-Pentecostalism", 119.

83 As suggested by Asamoah-Gyadu, "Evangelism", 310, following Kwame Bediako.

modernisation and secularisation. If this is the case, African Pentecostalism will eventually develop forms of internal theological critique, pushing towards a more rationalised take of reality, more or less in the same way as in 18th century European evangelicalism. In terms of research, this would mean that global Pentecostalism as a social movement should not merely be compared with 18th century Methodism, but also with those preceding forms of popular Protestantism in Europe which predicated on a much more profoundly enchanted worldview with all its attendant insecurity and existential angst.

A second consideration is that within the post-colonial consciousness of African nations, Christianity, or rather religiosity in general,[84] can easily become an expression of 'Africanness', especially with reference to the West. 'Notoriously religious' Africans are thus distinguished from their former colonizers. Here I point to David Martin's theory of different historical pathways of secularisation, mentioned in section 1. High levels of religious belief and commitment can be maintained, even within a secularising continent, if religion has become a badge of cultural identity, something that makes 'us' distinct from 'them'. Catholic Poland and Protestant Northern Ireland are good examples from Europe, as well as the Dutch (Protestant) Bible Belt, that more or less marks the boundary between the Protestant North and the Catholic South. At the same time, such constructions are extremely vulnerable to power abuse and unholy alliances between politics and religion. In the long run such alliances may very well breed (sometimes quite aggressive) secularisation, especially when old conflicts lose their mobilising force. Given the current appeals to African governments to tone down their religious rhetoric, and thus become more 'secular',[85] some signs of such a process may already be observable here and there.

Third, it is important to remember that most Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa is still very young. The great revivals in 18th-century Western Europe happened when Christianity had been present in those regions for more than a millennium. So, the possible secularising potential of Pentecostalism might be more clearly visible in societies where there is a longer history of Christianity, more social differentiation and more influence from intentional secularist politics (*laïcité*). A comparison with Latin America may therefore

84 Cf. Danoye Oguntola Laguda, "Religious Pluralism and Secularisation in the Nigerian Religious Sphere", in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies: Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona,* eds. Afe Adogame et al. (London: Routledge, 2013), 25-34.

85 Cf. the (generally religion-friendly) pleas in "What Secularism Means to Africa: What it has been, what it hasn't been and what it could mean for human rights", *Global Interfaith & Secular Alliance* (2017).

be helpful. David Martin characterizes the late modern Pentecostal revivals in Latin America as follows:[86]

> The context is that of religious entrepreneurship in a competitive religious economy and of enthusiastic participation on the part of all the believers; the inner transformation is that of honest dealing, trustworthiness, peaceableness, hard work, independence, self help, mutual assistance, and the ability to be articulate and fluent in the presence of others. Clearly all this has implications for the world of work as well as for the kind of work preferred. (…) Within a generation they may have put a foot on the ladder of small business or of educational advance.[87]

As Martin concentrates on the cultural conditions that make Pentecostalism successful, he does not analyse its potential for secularising its constituency in the long run. In passing, however, he notes 'the obvious difficulty of holding young people, especially males, when confronted by the seductions of the adolescent and young adult life-style'. Also he mentions the 'bureaucratization of churches' and 'the relativization of perspective which arrives as the next generation acquires education'.[88] He observes the 'serious tension' between 'satisfied bodies and full pockets' on the one hand, and the 'central thrust of consumer capitalism' on the other. Yet, he emphasises Pentecostalism's ascetic attitude with regard to money, sexual promiscuity and the use of mass media — and he seems to trust that this will remain a characteristic of the movement in the future.[89]

However, it is well known that turnover rates among Latin American Pentecostals are very high and that many dropouts stay out of church altogether.[90] For example, a Brazilian study reports that 59% of all Pentecostals who change

86 According to a recent Pew survey, 7% (Paraguay) to 41% (Guatemala and Honduras) of the populations across Latin America identify as Protestants. The average percentage of Protestants in the continent is 19%. Most Protestants (ca. 65%) are Pentecostals. Only 9% of Latin Americans were raised in Protestant churches, however, showing the attractiveness of these churches to Catholics. The most frequently cited reason for Catholics to become Protestants was that they were 'seeking a more personal connection with God' ("Religion in Latin America", *Pew Research Center*, 13 November 2014).

87 David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 72-73.

88 Ibid., 73-74. He adds: 'These processes have tamed the organizational thrust of earlier movements like Methodism and dampened the ardor of believers'.

89 Ibid., 76-77.

90 The Pew report 'Religion in Latin America' (2014) mentions that in 1910, an estimated 94% of the Latin Americans were Catholics, and ca. 1% Protestants. Catholics began to decline as a share of the region's population in the 1970s. In 2014, 69% of Latin Americans

their religion in Brazil end up in the 'no religion' category. A survey among 2,400 Christians in Nicaragua (2000) showed that Protestant church disaffiliation was as high as 27% (19% as 'no religion'). And three consecutive surveys in Costa Rica (1989-1994) showed that the Protestant apostasy rate was around 50%.[91] David Martin quotes from Kurt Bowen's *Evangelism and Apostasy* (1996), based on research in Mexico.[92] This study shows that 43% of Pentecostal converts ceased to be evangelicals in the second generation, of whom the great majority described themselves as 'nothing'. Also, it appears that 'nearly two in three of evangelical women stay committed in the second generation, compared with only one in three of men'. This is interesting, given the fact that these Pentecostal converts were mainly from the poorer classes, and that especially the men reported an improvement of their living standards. This suggests that there is a correlation between upward mobility and the erosion of religious fervour.

Finally, yet another way of 'testing' the secularising potential of African Pentecostalism is to observe it under the very different circumstances of the African diaspora in the West. After all, secularisation is more likely to happen if people actually *get* wealthy rather than merely desiring to be rich. A nagging problem with Pentecostalism's emphasis on prosperity is that wealth-inducing values alone are usually not sufficient to achieve riches. The prosperity preaching of Pentecostalism in many African nations is greatly hindered by societal conditions that are harmful for economic development, such as instable governments and widespread corruption. In most Western nations, however, conditions for economic improvement are more favourable and this might liberate the Pentecostal potential for prosperity. In his study of the (originally Nigerian) Redeemed Christian Church of God in Finland, Mika Vähäkangas, for example, argues that it makes sense for the upwardly mobile poor to join such a prosperity-preaching church, as these churches advocate pro-economic values such as 'temperance, honesty and diligence, not committing adultery (…), as well

identified as Catholics, while 19% belonged to the Protestant churches and 8% are religiously unaffiliated.

91 Henri Gooren, "Conversion Careers in Latin America", in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, eds. Timothy J. Steigenga, Edward L. Cleary (Piscataway: Rutgers Press, 2007), 63-64.

92 Ibid., 113-115. Cf. Kurt Bowen, *Evangelism and Apostasy* (London and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). Martin affirms that Bowen's study presents more or less the same conclusions as the research done on his own behalf by the *Centro de Estudios Publicos* in Chile.

as valuing an entrepreneurial spirit'.[93] Especially in stable, democratic, high-trust countries like Finland the promotion of such values promises material success. However, he adds that 'those who have already achieved relative success, might, at some point, begin to feel the need for a less pressing theological approach'.[94] Within an already secularised society this may easily lead to rapid secularisation after the first generation of immigrants. So, another avenue for future research may lie in the possible secularisation of African youth in the cities of the West.

5 Conclusions

Christian revivals seem to take off most convincingly in contexts of beginning industrialisation and urbanisation, among populations who share the basic tenets of Christian cosmology.[95] In such contexts the older religious system — rooted in collective patterns around agricultural (*hacienda*) life — comes under tension to the point of breaking, but at the same time it still contains enough resources to renew itself and to become the inspirational force for new generations. Thus, Christianity can be 're-vived', but in a different form, geared to the needs of a different environment. In this way it creates social capital where none existed, and it motivates and sustains a labour force which — at least in Latin America — shifts 'from being pre-modern to post-industrial often in one traumatic step'.[96]

While revivalistic Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, seems to lead a certain number of its adherents into a post-Christian (or at least a post-church) life in Latin America, it is still unclear to what extent this is happening in Africa. Admittedly, there are clear indications of secularisation among the educated elite and the wealthy urban minorities, and there are some attempts to differentiate church and state, but it is unclear to what extent this is related to revivalism. However, there are unequivocal tendencies towards the creation of 'buffered selves' in African revivalism, especially in Pentecostalism's emphasis on individualism, self-management and an entrepreneurial spirit. Also, its rather instrumental view of religion in the service of gaining earthly goods may

93 Mika Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel in the African Diaspora: Unethical Theology or Gospel in Context?", *Exchange* 44 (2015), 370.

94 Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel", 378.

95 Andrew F. Walls, "The Eighteenth Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context", in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 22-44, esp. 41.

96 Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 81-82.

form a context for secularisation eventually, once these goods are achieved. Finally, the constant pressure from Pentecostal preachers on their members and their high demands in terms of money and time, seems to push a considerable number of people to other churches or outside the church at all.

On the other hand, African Pentecostalism is thoroughly enchanted, even though this enchantment may be interpreted as a transitory phenomenon in the processes of urbanisation, modernisation and industrialisation. Admittedly, some structural features that have caused secularisation in the West are in place, or are beginning to take shape, such as an increasing number of 'nones', growing unbelief among some sub-groups such as wealthy urban elites, more public voices of atheists and agnostics, nations that separate church and state, disappointment with the behaviour of church leaders and changing patterns of family life. As far as I can tell there is no reason to assume that Africans are different from other people in that they are somehow immune to a secular worldview. On the other hand, the connection between 'Africanness' and 'religion', the immense vitality of grassroots' religiosity in Sub-Saharan Africa and the relative lack of credible non-religious alternatives are strong buffers against secularisation. At least, for now.